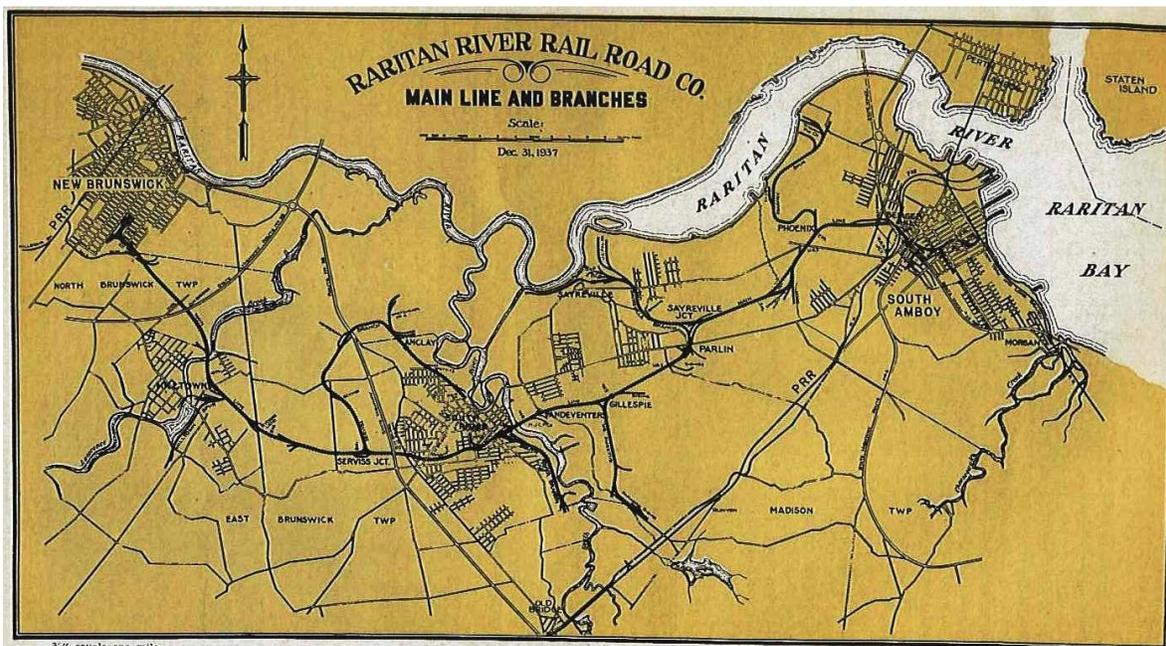


## Summer Smorgasbord of Environmental Learning: The Raritan River, Part 1 A Quick History and Overview

### The Raritan River

The Raritan River is a historical waterbody and has played a major role in supporting people by providing food, drinking water, and allowing for travel and trade. According to a historical timeline of the area published by Rutgers University, which can be found [here](#), the original residents of the Raritan River were the Lenape around year 1000. They remained the sole inhabitants of this land until 1683 when European settlers came to the area and utilized the land for its fertile soil and the river for transportation. In 1824, the Supreme Court broke up a monopoly of New York waters that was held by the inventor of the steamboat. This ruling turned the Raritan into a main trade route for various industries. About 8 years later, the start of the industrial revolution along the river paved the way for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Around 1888, the Raritan River Railroad was created as a form of public transportation until it eventually switched to industrial use only. Continuing with this trend, in the early 1910s, the manufacturing that took place along the river increased to aid in World War I and was even further developed during World War II.



Map of the Raritan River Railroad, circa 1937. [Source](#).

### The Raritan and Duke Farms

Jumping forward to 1960 and the relationship between the Duke family and the Raritan River, J.B. Duke owned the power canal and dam at the Nevius Street Bridge in Raritan. This is located at the north end of the property. The county park just about 5-miles northwest of the Duke Estate, once known as the Raritan River Area Park needed the dam to be restored in order for the canal to continue functioning. By this time J.B.'s daughter, Doris, was the owner of the Duke property and donated money to restore the dam and surrounding areas. The park was renamed in honor of Doris Duke's donation and is now known as Duke Island Park.



### Activity: Analyzing and Writing Nature Poetry

Below is a poem from John Davis written in 1608 about the Raritan River. How do you interpret this poem? Why do you think Davis wrote it? What do you think he was feeling when he wrote it?

#### ODE TO THE RARITAN RIVER

Lost in a pleasing wild surprise,  
I mark the fountains round me rise  
And in an artless current flow  
Thro' dark and lofty woods below,  
That from the world the soul confine  
And raise the thoughts to things divine.

O sacred stream! a stranger, I  
Would stay to see thee passing by,  
And mark thee wandering thus alone,  
With varied turns so like my own!  
Wild, as a stranger led astray,  
I see thee wind in woods away,  
And hasting thro' the trees to glide,  
As if thy gentle face to hide,  
While oft in vain thou wouldst return  
To visit here thy native urn;  
But, like an exile doomed no more  
To see the scenes he loved before,  
You wander on, and wind in vain,  
Dispersed amid the boundless main.

Here often, on thy borders green,  
Perhaps thy native sons were seen,  
Ere slaves were made, or gold was known,  
Or children from another zone  
Inglorious did with axes rude  
Into thy noble groves intrude,  
And forced thy naked son to flee  
To woods where he might still be free.

And thou! that art my present theme,  
O gentle spirit of the stream!  
Then too, perhaps, to thee was given  
A name among the race of heaven;  
And oft adored by Nature's child  
Whene'er he wandered in the wild.

And oft perhaps, beside the flood,  
In darkness of the grove he stood,  
Invoking here thy friendly aid  
To guide him thro' the doubtful shade;  
Till overhead the moon in view  
Thro' heaven's blue fields the chariot drew,  
And showed him all thy wat'ry face,  
Reflected with a purer grace,  
Thy many turnings thro' the trees,  
Thy bitter journey to the seas;  
While oft thy murmurs loud and long  
Awaked his melancholy song;  
Which thus in simple strain began,  
"Thou Queen of Rivers, Raritan."

John Davis, 1806<sup>1</sup>



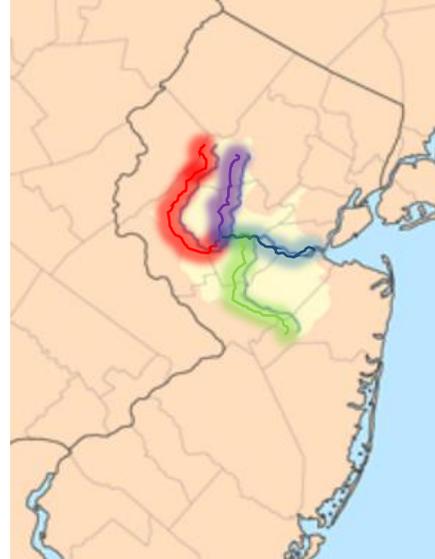
You can learn more about John Davis's poem and other historical events [here](#).



If you can, find a spot by a river or stream near you. Take a moment to get settled and listen to the sounds, see the sights, smell the scents, and feel the textures around you. Write a poem about this spot. It could include how it makes you feel to be here, why this spot is important to you, memories, or just observations about that nature that is around. [Here is a guide](#) to writing different types of poems.

### The River as It Is Now

The Raritan River is an essential source of freshwater throughout central New Jersey. It makes up the limitations of the Raritan River Basin, or watershed, that covers approximately 1,100 square miles of central NJ. The river supplies drinking water to two large reservoirs in the area: Spruce Run Reservoir and Round Valley Reservoir. While it is not the longest river in the state, it is the longest river that is contained solely within the state's boundaries. It cuts straight through the middle of New Jersey, with at least 45 tributaries in numerous locations along the river. It stretches about 105 miles with three main sections: The South Branch and North Branch (the Upper Raritan River) and the main branch (the Lower Raritan River).



Map of the Raritan Basin (light yellow boundaries) with the Raritan River and a few main tributaries highlighted. The South Branch (red), the North Branch (purple), the main stretch (blue), and the Millstone river (green). [Source](#).

**The South Branch** (in red on the map) stretching about 50 miles long, starts at Budd Lake, flowing down through Long Valley, Califon, Clifton, Flemington, and Neshanic Station.

**The North Branch** (in purple on the map) reaching about 20 miles long, starts in Mendham, flowing down through Peapack and Bedminster.

**The Main Branch** (in blue on the map) connects to the north and south branches [here](#) in Branchburg. From there, the river flows east through Somerville, Piscataway, and East Brunswick, until it eventually reaches the Raritan Bay in South Amboy. This section of the river is about 30 miles long. From the Raritan Bay, the water lets out into the Sandy Hook Bay (south) and the Lower New York Bay (north), eventually connecting to the Atlantic Ocean.



Map of the Raritan River from Branchburg to Perth Amboy and the Raritan Bay. [Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership](#).



### More Activities with Poetry

- Consider the following selections or discover your own. How might you compare elements of these poems, and the one by John Davis, beyond the fact that they all include rivers?
- How do you see that rivers can be used as a writer's tool to create similes or metaphors? How do these writing tools provide a vivid picture in a reader's mind? Provide examples using the word river. (The river **is** a blue ribbon stretching to the sea. The river **is like** a blue ribbon stretching to the sea.)
- Investigate these words: river, stream, brook. Are they the same? Are there other words to describe waterways?
- What natural features of a river captivate human imagination and creativity? Explain your answer.

### The Bear, The Fire, and The Snow by [Shel Silverstein](#)

"I live in fear of the snow," said the bear.  
"Whenever it's here, be sure I'll be there.  
Oh, the pain and the cold,  
When one's bearish and old.  
I live in fear of the snow."

"I live in fear of the fire," said the snow.  
"Whenever it comes then it's time I must go.  
With its yellow lick flames  
Leaping higher and higher,  
I live in fear of the fire."

"I live in fear of the river," said the fire.  
"It can drown all my flames anytime it desires,  
And the thought of the wet  
Makes me sputter and shiver.  
I live in fear of the river."

"I live in fear of the bear," said the river.  
"It can lap me right up, don't you know?"  
While a mile away  
You can hear the bear say,  
"I live in fear of the snow."



**A River Poem by [Mamta Sagar](#)**

Inside the river are  
the sky, the cloud, and the sun.  
In my hands' bowl is the river.

If I throw up my hands,  
the river spills in drops, scattering  
sky, cloud, and sun all o'er me.

From my hands' bowl, if I drink  
the river, then within me,  
the sun, the cloud, and the sky.

Tell me, who is in who?

**New Jersey Student Learning Standards for English Language Arts**

RL.2.4. Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

RL.2.10. Read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, at grade level text complexity or above with scaffolding as needed.

R4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

RL.5.2. Determine the key details in a story, drama, or poem to identify the theme and to summarize the text.

RL.5.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

RL.5.5. Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

RL.5.6. Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

For more cross-curricular connections, contact Kate Reilly, Manager of Education, Duke Farms.

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